

TWIST ACTION FRICTION DRIVE

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

This invention relates to twist action friction drives.

PRIOR ART

From the prior art is known a twist action friction drive in which a roller means, driven in rotation about an axis inclined to that of a driven member, comprises three rollers all hydrostatically mounted about axes inclined relative to that of the driven member. The arrangement is complex, and requires that all the rollers are mounted at precisely the same inclination or helix angle if conflicting drive forces, leading to an unpredictable advance of the driven member, are to be avoided. This and other prior art arrangements are also disadvantageous in that the rollers rotate around the outside of the driven member.

THE INVENTION

According to the invention, there is provided a twist roller friction drive comprising a rotating drive bar which drives in rotation roller means the axis of rotation of which is inclined relative to the axis of a rotationally fixed driven member with which the roller means engages, wherein the inclined roller means comprises a single annular roller urged from the inside into driving contact with the driven member by one or more hydrostatic pads.

Preferably the driven member is a tube and the skewed annular roller is in frictional engagement with the bore of the tube. The tube is preferably a steel tube, with a hardened and ground bore. In a typical use, the tube is fixed to the carriage of a machine tool, aligned with the machine axis.

Oil for the hydrostatic pads acting on the roller is preferably supplied through the drive bar along the axis thereof. Such drive bar preferably comprises a cylindrical tube.

At its trailing end, the drive bar rotationally drives a skewed roller assembly in which the annular roller is incorporated, the remote forward end of the drive bar being driven in rotation, as by an electric motor. The rotationally driven, forward end of the drive bar is preferably located, albeit indirectly, by hydrostatic bearings. The oil supply for these bearings therefore constitutes a convenient source from which oil may be supplied along the central axis of the drive bar to the skewed roller assembly, via suitable restrictors.

At the skewed roller assembly, drillings are preferably provided to supply oil to the bore and end faces of the roller, so that it is fully floating hydrostatically. Further drillings may supply oil to four equidistantly spaced hydrostatic pads which urge the skewed roller assembly radially so that the roller is in frictional driving engagement with the driven tube. Oil seeping from the roller assembly is preferably returned to a sump at the driven end of the drive bar, conveniently via the interior of an extensible tube (which may be corrugated for this purpose or of a telescoping design), which is secured between the forward end of the driven tube and a housing at the forward end of the drive bar wherein drillings are provided to supply oil to the hydrostatic bearings which locate a rotating assembly carrying the forward end of the drive bar.

In the arrangement according to the invention, the axial movement of the driven member is principally determined by the angle of skew of the roller. Thus, if this angle is made very small, small precise axial movements of say 1 nm (nanometre) or less of the driven member can readily be

achieved per revolution of the drive bar, as compared, for example, to axial movements of the order of 150 mm per revolution with a capstan drive, and 10 to 15 mm in the case of a hydrostatic nut drive. It follows that a relatively high speed drive motor can be employed, which is advantageous for velocity feedback control.

DESCRIPTION OF EMBODIMENT

A practical example of twist action friction drive is now described by way of example with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

FIG. 1 shows the complete drive in axial cross section;

FIGS. 2 and 3 are axial cross sections, in different planes, through the skewed roller assembly; and

FIG. 4 is a transverse cross section through the skewed roller assembly.

The twist action friction drive shown in FIG. 1 comprises, on the left, a driving head 10 wherein an assembly 12 within a housing 14 is able to be driven in rotation by an electric motor 16 in order to impart a rotational drive to the forward end of a drive bar 18 in the form of a cylinder having a central axial passage 19. The construction of the driving head 10 is not of importance in the present invention except for the hydrostatic bearings 20 used in the rotating assembly 12. An oil return passage to the sump is indicated at 22. The motor 16 includes a tachometer 17 for measuring the speed of the motor output and a control unit 15 for controlling the motor speed in response to the output from the tachometer 17.

The invention is essentially concerned with the skewed roller assembly 24 shown on the right-hand side of FIG. 1, and also in FIGS. 2 to 4. The purpose of this skewed roller assembly is to drive an outer tube 26, which in practice is fixed to the carriage of a machine tool, with a precisely controlled linear, axial movement.

The skewed roller assembly is carried by a central shaft 28 fixed to and extending from the trailing end of the drive bar 18 with its axis at a small angle of inclination to that of the drive bar. Fixed to the shaft 28 to rotate concentrically therewith about the skewed axis is the annular roller assembly, formed as inner and outer parts 30, 32. The skewed outer part 32 is urged by four hydrostatic pads 34 (see FIGS. 2 and 4) to bear against the interior of the outer tube 26 at points around a helical path, whereby the outer tube is frictionally driven with a linear axial movement as the roller assembly rotates.

FIG. 3 shows, in particular, that oil is also supplied, as indicated at 36, to the axial face and the end faces of the roller assembly 30, 32, so that the assembly is fully floating, hydrostatically. Oil pressure at the roller assembly, including that of the hydrostatic pads 34, is controlled by restrictors 38 in the central axial passage in the drive bar 18.

Oil seeping to the outside of the roller assembly 30, 32 and tending to fill the driven tube ahead of and to the rear of the roller assembly, is conveniently returned to the driving head 10, where the oil return passage 22 is located via the inside of a corrugated and axially extensible tube 40 fixed between the forward end of the driven tube 26 and the housing of the driving head.

I claim:

1. A twist action roller friction drive comprising a rotatable drive bar, a driven member which is rotationally fixed relative to the drive bar, and which is mounted for translational movement along a first axis, inclined roller means driven, in use, in rotation by the drive bar about a second